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RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA PRIORITY  
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD PRIORITY 1414  
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN PRIORITY 2008

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000436

SENSITIVE  
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STATE FOR NEA/ARP, OES/UHB, MED, AIAG  
STATE PASS TO AID  
HHS FOR OGHA  
HHS PASS TO CDC  
USDA PASS TO APHIS  
AMMAN FOR ESTH HUB OFFICER  
BAGHDAD FOR ESTH

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KFLU](#) [KSTH](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [KSCA](#) [KU](#)  
SUBJECT: KUWAIT'S H1N1 FLU PREPARATIONS

REF 08 KUWAIT 315

11. (SBU) Summary: Drawing on pre-existing avian influenza preparatory work, the GOK is proactively implementing measures to prepare Kuwait for a possible pandemic outbreak related to H1N1 influenza. Current measures include: passenger screening (for high temperature) at airports and seaports; procurement of additional antiviral medication; referral of suspected cases, if any, to the Infectious Diseases Hospital; monitoring and treatment of those in contact with suspected cases, if any; establishment of an H1N1 flu hotline; and contingency plans for school closings and restrictions on public gatherings including election rallies. Meanwhile, Post has initiated daily meetings of a sub-group of the pandemic influenza working group and has disseminated two warden messages, one of which was carried on front pages in local newspapers April 130. End Summary

12. (SBU) Emboffs met with Dr. Musaab Al-Saleh, Director of the Communicable Diseases Department at the Ministry of Health (MOH), and his deputy, Dr. Najla Al-Odhaidhan on April 30 to discuss the GOK's pandemic influenza preparedness. Al-Saleh, who is the GOK's principal coordinator for pandemic flu preparedness, provided a detailed overview of the Ministry's planning, as well as measures at Kuwait International Airport. Al-Saleh -- a respected U.S.-trained public health expert -- was open in his opinion that the H1N1 flu outbreak had significant potential to result in a global pandemic. He emphasized that updates and guidelines enunciated by the USG's CDC and the WHO are informing his department's policies vis-`-vis H1N1 influenza.

#### AIRPORT MEASURES

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13. (SBU) MOH officials at the airport have begun screening passengers arriving from affected countries, including the U.S. and the United Kingdom. Medical personnel are checking passengers' temperatures using non-invasive laser technology. Musaab said that the GOK had placed an "urgent" order for thermal scanning equipment, computers and software, which will be installed at the airport in approximately 10 days. He said that arriving passengers would be asked to complete health questionnaires and would be instructed to report to a Government clinic if they developed flu-like symptoms within seven days of arriving in Kuwait. However, recent reports from the airport and the local United Airlines office indicate that airport authorities are imposing more stringent requirement, whereby

all passengers arriving from the U.S. and other affected countries are required to report to a Government hospital within 72 hours of arriving in Kuwait. (Note: Econoff subsequently spoke to Al-Saleh who insisted that his earlier statement stood and that the airport authorities' actions were not authorized by his office. He undertook to try to correct the situation. Post will continue to follow up. End note).

¶4. (SBU) Al-Saleh said that the GOK had no plans to restrict entry to travelers from affected countries; he added that any such decision is "political" and would likely involve the Council of Ministers. He agreed to remain in constant contact with the Embassy on this subject. He noted that the GOK was concerned about the impact of a pandemic in Iraq and the potential for Iraqis to try to cross into Kuwait, which could overwhelm Kuwait's health care system.

¶5. (U) Al-Odhaidhan said that the MOH was implementing procedures developed over the past three years to contend with an avian flu-initiated pandemic. As such, she and Al-Saleh voiced confidence in the MOH's ability to react to suspected cases of H1N1 flu in Kuwait. They said that all doctors had been instructed to refer suspected cases to the Infections Diseases Hospital and that all testing would be undertaken by the MOH's virology laboratory, which has been in communication with the CDC in Atlanta, GA. They said that people who might have been in contact with those affected by H1N1 flu would be monitored and, where appropriate, provided with antiviral medicines and/or quarantined in their homes.

¶6. (U) The MOH has established an H1N1 flu hotline for citizens and residents of Kuwait, currently open from 8am to 10pm, though Al-Odhaidhan said the center's operations may become 24/7. Al-Saleh

KUWAIT 00000436 002 OF 002

said that 50% of the inquiries coming into the center relate to travel and tourism: he said that the MOH was recommending that Kuwaitis postpone tourism-related travel for the time being. The MOH is forming a media team to handle outreach with local media and may prepare a dedicated website for informing the general public.

¶7. (SBU) Al-Odhaidhan said that the GOK currently has 10 million doses of Tamiflu and Al-Saleh said that the MOH is procuring a further 2.5 million doses. He said the MOH was also procuring additional stocks of Relenza.

¶8. (SBU) Al-Saleh said that GOK officials have discussed the possibility of closing schools and restricting public gatherings in the event of an outbreak in Kuwait. Responding to a question from emboffs, he said that if the situation warranted it, he and his superiors would formally recommend postponing the parliamentary elections slated for May 16.

¶9. (SBU) Al-Saleh asked for information regarding the U.S. military's measures to screen servicemen and women arriving in Kuwait. Emboffs told him that U.S. military elements in Kuwait have worked on pandemic flu preparedness and that a formal briefing could be arranged, if the MOH so requested.

#### POST'S MEASURES

¶10. (SBU) A sub-group of Post's pandemic influenza working group is meeting daily to ensure coordination and flow of information (MGMT, CONS, ECON, HU, RSO and PAS). The pandemic influenza working group will meet on Sunday, April 3, to review Post's tripwires and to discuss preparedness. (Note: Post recently completed an extensive redrafting of pandemic influenza tripwires (reftel). End note).

¶11. (U) Post's consular section disseminated warden messages relating to H1N1 influenza preparedness on April 29 and 30, the earlier of which was carried on front pages in local newspapers.

JONES